R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 016 667 TE 000 283

THE "NEW" GRAMMAR, A SHORT INTRODUCTION FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS.

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PUB DATE 66

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$1.60 38P.

DESCRIPTORS- *APPLIED LINGUISTICS, *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, *GRAMMAR, *LINGUISTICS, ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL, LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, LANGUAGE RESEARCH, LANGUAGE USAGE, LINGUISTIC THEORY, ELEMENTARY EDUCATION, SECONDARY EDUCATION, DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS, NEW GRAMMAR

ANY GRAMMAR IS THE SYSTEM OF LANGUAGE STRUCTURES USED BY A GROUP OF PEOPLE TO CONVEY MEANING. THE "NEW" ENGLISH GRAMMAR IS AN OBJECTIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE STRUCTURES OF OUR LANGUAGE SYSTEM. THE DESCRIPTION IS OBTAINED BY THE STUDY OF THE CHARACTERISTIC SOUNDS, WORD GROUPS, AND WORD FORMS OF SPEECH. THE "NEW" GRAMMAR IS PART OF THE DISCIPLINE OF LINGUISTICS WHICH HAS ESTABLISHED THAT THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SYSTEM GAINS MEANING VIA FOUR SIGNALLING DEVICES--(1) INTONATION, (2) WORD POSITION, (3) WORD FORM, AND (4) WORD FUNCTION. THESE DEVICES DETERMINE GRAMMATICAL RATHER THAN LEXICAL MEANING, ENABLING PEOPLE TO MANIPULATE ENGLISH GRAMMAR UNCONSCIOUSLY. RECOGNIZING CHANGE AS AN INHERENT QUALITY OF LANGUAGE, LINGUISTICS DISTINGUISHES USAGE FROM GRAMMAR. INSTEAD OF PRESCRIBING USAGE, MODERN GRAMMAR DESCRIBES IT, EMPHASIZING THE DESIRABILITY OF THE STANDARD DIALECT, NOT AS THE ONLY FORM OF ENGLISH, BUT AS THE ONE WITH THE GREATEST PRESTIGE. FOR INSTRUCTORS, "NEW" GRAMMAR REQUIRES INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND PREPARATION. FOR ADMINISTRATORS, IT PRESENTS THE TASK OF INTERPRETING CHANGE TO SCHOOL FACULTIES, TO PARENTS, AND TO STUDENTS. FROM THE LINGUISTIC VIEWPOINT, HOWEVER, THE BENEFITS OUTWEIGH THE DIFFICULTIES. (AUTHOR/MM)

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State of Nebraska
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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THE "NEW" GRAMMAR

A Short Introduction for School Administrators

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This publication is made possible by a grant of money from the Federal Government through Title Five of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to the Nebraska State Department of Education.

State Capitol, 1966 Lincoln

FOREWORD

It is not uncommon in our day to learn that new programs, new endeavors, new developments need interpretation. To interpret the new seems to suggest that a definition of the old is also in order. Human nature being what it is, it is not uncommon for us to feel we know the old and therefore we are comfortable with it; but the new suggests change, and change along lines with which we are unfamiliar often results in our being uncomfortable.

So much has been written and spoken about the "new grammar" that the Department of Education has commissioned Mrs. Marilyn Marsh to write an explanation of it. We feel that many school administrators, especially new ones, members of boards of education, lay people, and teachers will be helped in their understanding of the new grammar through Mrs. Marsh's efforts.

Education has a deep commitment to be always looking for better ways. Just as it must not desert good practice because it is old, education must satisfy itself that anything innovative or new has successfully survived experimentation and evaluation.

The Department of Education sincerely hopes that this interpretation of the changing approaches to grammar will serve the purpose for which it is intended.

Floyd A. Miller
Commissioner of Education

INTRODUCTION

Currently, new interest is being awakened in the study and teaching of English—primarily because of the increased scholarship during the past twenty years or so which has produced new information regarding the language. In fact, many traditional concepts of the subject matter of English are actually being refuted by the discoveries of linguistics, an emerging discipline which applies the methods of science to the study of language.

For the English teacher, advances in linguistics have necessitated study as well as stimulated interest. The pros and cons of the "new" language concepts have been argued, but seldom ignored. For the school administrator and the layman as well, linguistics has seemed esoteric. As a result, confusion exists regarding first, the nature of "new" grammar, and second, its desirability as part of the school curriculum. For this reason, interpretation of the findings of linguistics as they relate to the teaching of English, particularly grammar, seems in order.

This writing, then, is intended as a guide to the nature of the linguistic approach to grammar. It does not presume to completeness nor to argument; rather, it is designed as a summary and introduction to further reading.

THE "NEW" GRAMMAR: A SHORT INTRODUCTION FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Part I

The "New" Grammar: What Is It?

In this twentieth-century age of specialization, a curious paradox exists for the educational administrator—he's expected to be a Renaissance man, knowledgeable in every aspect of burgeoning American education. Certainly, he and his staff work today within a rebirth of learning, a rebirth stimulated largely by the impact of science and characterized by innovations in teaching techniques and subject content.

Not only must the educator be current with techniques like team teaching, programmed teaching machines, and educational television, he must orient himself to content changes occurring in the "new" math, science, and English grammar.

How can English—a subject which has been in the public schools for two hundred years—be new today? In the same way that math, physics, or any other subject can be new. The "new" grammar or structural grammar, or modern grammar, as it is variously designated, has appeared within the past decade or so simply because within that time scientific methods have stimulated new research and new discoveries about language. And these new discoveries, agree many scholars, make it as unrealistic to teach tra-

ditional grammar as it would be to teach pre-Darwinian biology or four-element chemistry.

But confusion reigns—not only within the lay public, but within departments of English and within school administrations. For though grammar is regarded by many as the dullest of subjects, proposed changes in its personality engender strong emotions. After all, language is social. Used by everyone, it is common property suddenly become a prized possession.

Are two hundred years of instruction in its use to be discarded in one mighty sweep? If so, what about the people (including school administrators) of an earlier era? Will their use of the language become obsolete? Must they be retrained? Is the "new" grammar really more scientific, better than the old? Or is it simply more fashionable, more avant garde?

Because there is confusion, individuals take sides—for or against those who would modify the teaching of English, for or against new editions of established dictionaries.

Much of the confusion surrounding the "new" grammar results from a mixing of the numerous definitions given the word itself.

Grammar Defined

Originally, grammar referred to all language study; later, it came to designate the text in which the study was outlined as well; eventually, it stood also for the principles of any art, science, discipline, or practice.

Today, at least three definitions are in more common use.

First, for most laymen, grammar is etiquette: the "right" and "wrong" way to use the English language. It is generally agreed, for example, that "He ain't got no money" is wrong, is therefore poor grammar, and should be avoided. It is this definition upon which traditional grammar is based.

Second, for most modern grammarians, **grammar** denotes the system of language structures used to convey meaning. Though laymen are generally unconscious of this, they do recognize that they manipulate language fairly well at an early age, using nouns and verbs, for example, in meaningful sequence. Even a small child will say "How old are you?" in preference to "You how old are." In this sense, English grammar was fully operational long before anyone studied it, wrote a text on it, or formulated rules of right and wrong for it.

Third, for most language scholars, **grammar** is a branch of linguistics (the study of spoken language) concerned with the description and analysis of language. This particular branch, sometimes called "structural" grammar, focuses upon English structures (vowels, consonants, nouns, verbs, for example) while other branches emphasize the study of speech sounds, word meanings, language history, and usage varieties or dialects.

To those for whom the study of English has been the study of grammar embodied in the diagramming of sentences and the pruning of ain't from the vocabulary, two of these definitions may be unfamiliar. Each, however, is listed in both second and third editions of Webster's Inter-

national Dictionary. And each will be discussed in some detail in this summary.

For it is the purpose of this article to attempt to clear away confusion surrounding the "new" grammar by answering the following questions:

—What is the "new" grammar?

—How does it work?

—What are its implications for teaching?

Helpful in considering the first question is an examination of the attitudes and principles forming the basis of modern grammar. Because they vary considerably from the still-predominating attitudes and principles of traditional grammar, the primary characteristics of each approach may be summarized:

Traditional Versus "New" Attitudes

(1) Source—Educated primarily in the classics, the eighteenth-century authors of the original grammar books felt that Latin exemplified a universal grammar which could be applied to all languages. They therefore made Latin the model for the construction of an English grammar known today as "traditional" grammar.

Modern grammarians, however, know from their study of language history that there has never been a universal grammar, that each language possesses a grammar distinctly its own, much as individuals possess unique personalities. Furthermore, recognizing that language has its

origin in speech, they base today's grammar concepts upon living speech rather than recorded Latin.

(2) Intention—In formulating English grammar, the eighteenth-century scholars, using Latin declensions and parts of speech, worked from the general to the particular, categorizing items within an already established framework. Any differences between the operations of English and Latin they regarded as errors in English. It was necessary, therefore, to tell people what errors to avoid; in other words, grammarians attempted to prescribe "correct" English usage.

Instead of prescribing how English should be used, modern linguists try simply to describe how it is used, as a preliminary to examination revealing "how grammar ticks." This, in essence, is what makes modern language study a science: the accumulation of data, analysis of data, and formulation of generalizations regarding data.

(3) Character—The traditional approach to language analysis outlined above gave rise to at least two corollaries worth noting. Early grammarians, believing in an absolute standard of correctness, regarded deviations in usage as errors. They therefore did not recognize two aspects of language which modern grammarians accept as inevitabilities: historical change and varieties of usage.

Today's scholars, again from their knowledge of language history, know that English has been, is, and in all probability, will continue to be constantly changing. Contributing to the changes are the differing language habits of particular groups of people. Varieties in language use are consequently to be expected, and are not necessarily wrong.

The traditional approach treats grammar as an entity itself, to be applied to people's language habits. The modern approach recognizes grammar as an inherent aspect of people's language habits which develops naturally rather than conforming to preconceived standards.

Because some of the preceding explanation is new to the general public, the modern approach to grammar may seem unnecessarily complex. It is true that the traditional approach does lend itself more easily to concise and arbitrary statements about grammar than does modern linguistics.

But the key question at this point must be "From what basis does each approach originate?" Modern linguistics has the more valid foundation, for its principles come from scientific data recently obtained from the study of languages in general and English in particular.

Traditional Background

In contrast, the principles of traditional grammar originate in pre-scientific, eighteenth-century England. Known as the "Age of Reason," this century was characterized by a near mania for plan and order. Philosophy, literature, architecture, scientific thought—all adhered to rigid patterns or conventions. At the same time, the English language, because of the expanding British Empire, the emergence of the United States, and the increasing number of published materials, was becoming a language of world affairs. The impact of all this, merged with the spirit of the age, made it natural for scholars to feel that the study of their language should be introduced into the schools and that the language itself needed codification.

So codify it they did. Within the century appeared a dictionary and a grammar text which were to bear influence for over one hundred years. Dr. Samuel Johnson's **A Dictionary of the English Language,** published in 1755, provided illustrations of word history, pronunciation, syllabification, and most important, standards of correctness and usage, for it was the intent of the time to establish standards which would refine English and fix it permanently. Johnson's authoritarian attitude is obvious in this comment regarding his **Dictionary:** "I have laboured to refine our language to grammatical purity, and to clear it from colloquial barbarisms, licentious idioms, and irregular combinations."

Though not the first grammar text written (Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's contemporary, authored one, as did Joseph Priestley in 1761), Bishop Robert Lowth's **A Short Introduction to English Grammar,** published in 1762, experienced over twenty editions and set the example for subsequent texts. Lowth's technique was a negative one—to teach "correctness" by printing mistakes found in the works of published authors.

The importance of Lowth's work is that the pattern of thinking about language which it set is still apparent in most of the grammar books used today. The corrective spirit of the eighteenth century and in the still-current definition of grammar as linguistic etiquette is illustrated by Lowth's stated purpose: "The principal design of a Grammar of any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language; and to enable us to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not. The plain way of doing this is, to lay down rules, and to illustrate them by examples."

Many current grammatical conventions were first stated in this period: the distinction between **lie** and **lay**, and condemnation of **it is me**, for example. In addition, Lowth is responsible for the double negative rule: "Two negatives in English destroy one another, or are equivalent to an affirmative."

An imitation of Lowth's work which had comparable influence in America was Lindley Murray's text of 1795. In addition, Noah Webster earlier had continued the Lowth tradition in several publications. Before long, however, Webster criticized traditional grammar for its neglect of usage. Certainly, its principles had been formulated by individuals rather than by common speech habits.

Linguistic Background

It is Webster's criticism, of course, which has been echoed and emphasized by linguists in this century. Language is used rather than preserved. Its standards, therefore, should be dictated by use. In addition, while certain rules may be helpful, they should also be valid. Latin is not the same as English. For one thing, it is an inflectional language in which word forms determine the meaning of a statement far more than does word order. In contrast, the English language is one in which meaning is determined more by word position than by word form. If, for example, the common word endings are omitted from this sentence, it is still intelligible: "The boy drive the car reckless." If the word order is radically modified, however, it becomes unintelligible: "Drives car the recklessly boy the."

While traditional grammar has its origin in the eighteenth century, the discipline of linguistics, so critical of tradi-

tional thought, is still emerging. Its achievements have been most numerous in the past twenty-five years. But it is neither so new nor so radical as is generally supposed.

The scientific approach to the study of language originated a little over one hundred years ago in Europe when scholars began to examine primitive languages systematically and objectively, and to record facts and observations methodically as a facet of anthropology research. The research transcended its original purpose, however, becoming a discipline which established these concepts:

—Language is speech.

—Language changes constantly, regularly, and predictably.

—Many of the world's languages share enough similarities to have had common origins; they are consequently identified as language "families."

In order to arrive at these conclusions, scholars studied the speech sounds of early languages, then compared them closely. By this procedure and with the help of written documents, they were able to reconstruct languages never recorded by previous civilizations but authenticated by other data.

Since 1920, the prominent linguistic discoveries have been made in the United States, with historical emphasis giving way to the study of language structures. Here again, speech has provided the basis, with Charles C. Fries going so far as to tape several thousand hours of telephone conversation in order to provide data which, in addition to the findings of others, have contributed to the following conclusions:

—Language is structural; that is, it is a system comprised of individual units.

—The interaction of these individual language units determines lexical (dictionary) meaning.

—The interaction of these structural units also has a grammatical meaning of its own.

—This language system is learned early and unconsciously by native speakers of English.

Because of their technical nature of linguistic terminology, these findings preceded their application by a number of years. They were first used in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Gradually, however, linguistics is coming to the colleges and public schools, largely because of increasing scholarship combined with the popularizations written by George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith, Jr., Charles C. Fries, Paul M. Roberts, W. Nelson Francis, Charleton Laird, and others.

Summary

The current definitions of **grammar** as a language system and as a linguistic branch which were mentioned earlier in this article may be attributed to modern linguistics. But the major difference between the traditional and the linguistic approaches to language is one of attitude. Unlike the eighteenth-century grammarian, who wished to dictate language use, the linguist wishes to describe language operation. Surprisingly enough, it is this withdrawal of traditional authority, invalid as it is, which is contributing to the conflicting opinions regarding the "new" grammar,

for many people see the emerging concepts not as an opportunity for greater knowledge and responsibility about language, but as an invitation to its degeneration.

What is "new" about modern English grammar is largely the philosophy upon which it is based. Simply a system of language, modern grammar differs from traditional concepts in the sense that it is intrinsic rather than extrinsic, descriptive rather than prescriptive. Grammar itself is far from new—it has been evolving for centuries. The contemporary approach to the study of it, however, is new, for it is based upon information which the first grammarians did not possess. In brief, whereas traditional grammar continues to emphasize the "rules" of language, modern grammar describes the structures of English: its morphology (the study of word forms), syntax (the study of the sequence and relationships of grammatical units), and phonology (the study of language sounds).

Part II

The "New" Grammar: How Does It Work?

That the traditional and the modern approaches to the study of English grammar differ considerably in attitude and principle is obvious. How, then, do these approaches differ in practice? How does the "new" grammar work?

Basic to applied linguistics is the concept that English grammar is structural. In brief, grammar is a system comprised of language structures learned automatically in childhood. By imitating their elders, most children master both the sounds and structures of English by the age of six.

What are the "structures" of English? How does this learning take place? By imitating the sounds he hears, the young child learns to recognize which ones are meaningful —which are words and which are sentences, simply by distinguishing habitual English speech rhythms.

First, he notices that the pitch and volume of words vary in characteristic ways: speakers interrupt the flow of sound to produce small breaks between words and greater ones between sentences, and the pitch of their words drops at the completion of most utterances.

Second, he realizes that words and word groups arrange themselves repeatedly in the same or similar positions, so he imitates the arrangements, learning to say "I want an ice cream bar," rather than "Ice cream bar I want."

Third, he begins to recognize that specific words such as **a, an, the, to** and **with** tend to group other words into distinguishable units which usually explain or amplify basic noun-verb structures.

Finally, he learns that the same word may possess different forms, that he should say "I like hot dogs," rather than "I am liking hot dogs," and "I'm tired," rather than "I'm tire."

When the child has learned all this, he has mastered the rudiments of English grammar. The remarkable thing is not that he **does** learn this, but that he learns it unconsciously.

For the English language operates according to the set of four signals outlined above: (1) intonation, (2) word position, (3) word function, and (4) word form. And these signals are used by the speaker without his being aware of them.

Meaning Versus Meaning

When the modern grammarian explains English grammar in this way, particularly as he involves the six-year old, he is frequently accused of oversimplification. But he is speaking from a common-sense principle missing from traditional grammar—that there are two types of meaning common to English sentences: lexical (dictionary) meaning and grammatical (structural) meaning. And this principle has been established by extensive observation of actual speech habits.

The first type of meaning is that used in traditional grammar. For example, it is said that a sentence is a "complete thought," and that a noun "names a person, place, or thing." But the difficulties are obvious. What is a complete thought? An incomplete thought? Is **truth** a person, place, thing?

The second type of meaning is that currently being introduced. Its significance is that it is based upon the grammatical units of a construction only.

Language learning via grammatical structures and their accompanying signals rather than via lexical meaning is not as difficult as it seems. It seems so only because lexical meanings are learned consciously and continually throughout life, whereas grammatical meanings are learned automatically and very early in life.

To demonstrate that lexical meaning is not essential to an understanding of English grammar, linguists often employ "nonsense" language — words which have no dictionary meaning, like this example:

Those swozzles are minsily gorgling the torves.

Even a layman unschooled in linguistics can determine the function of most words in the example, simply because of his unconscious knowledge of English grammatical structures, particularly their position and form.

Isn't it quite clear that **swozzles** is a noun, **minsily** an adverb, **gorgled** a verb, and **torves** a noun? Such a conclusion, which simply "seems right" to laymen, can be validated by more technical observations. **Swozzles** is a noun because it follows the word **those**, has a characteristic

s ending, and appears at the beginning of the sentence. **Gorgling** is a verb because it follows **are** and possesses a characteristic **ing** ending. **Minsily** is an adverb because it precedes a verb and has the characteristic **ly** ending. Finally, **torves** is another noun because of its **s** ending and its position at the end of the sentence.

Again, the layman can determine whether or not the nonsense construction is a sentence by (1) reading it aloud to see if its intonation sounds "complete" and (2) by noticing that the entire structure may be split into two parts: subject and verb. If he has been told that nearly every English sentence is one of six or seven basic patterns constantly repeated in the language, he may distinguish the construction as a sentence in yet a third way—by its pattern.

Instinct, or "sentence sense," then, is not to be ignored in language, for it is based upon a familiarity with grammatical patterns which begins almost in infancy. The modern grammarian has simply observed, then enumerated these patterns for the first time. Because these structural habits are acquired so early, they are formed completely without reference to the lexical meanings of individual words.

True, there are some similarities between traditional and linguistic practice. The "new" grammar classifies structures into parts of speech as does traditional grammar; in addition, it retains the binary concept that most English sentences can be divided into two parts—subject and predicate. But the reasoning behind the practice differs. In the "new" grammar, an adjective is identified not because it "describes," but because it frequently ends in **y** and commonly

appears either directly before a noun or at the end of a sentence. In the "new" grammar, a sentence is identified not because it is or is not "a complete thought," but because it is one of the six or seven basic patterns upon which all English sentences are based.

Grammar Versus Usage

The differences between traditional and linguistic practice, however, are greater than the similarities—largely because of what the disciplines attempt to encompass. If, for example, English grammar is reducible to the concepts outlined above, laymen may rightly ask about the **who** versus **whom, like** versus **as,** area remaining. Is it to be ignored by the "new" grammar?

Not ignored, but placed in a new perspective; for the use of constructions like **due to** rather than **because of** or "It is me," rather than "It is I," from the linguist's viewpoint, is not a matter of grammar, but of usage. Grammar denotes the patterns and structures employed to convey meaning in a given language. Usage denotes the varying choices which individuals make in speaking or writing the language.

The "new" grammar distinguishes between grammar and usage, contending that the individual should be informed of the varied language habits existing as a prerequisite to personal decision; traditional grammar makes no such distinction, maintaining that one is either right or wrong in language use.

This difference in practice, derived from the opposing philosophies outlined in Part I, forms the heart of the con-

troversy between traditional and modern grammar, for most traditional grammarians insist that to separate grammar and usage is to abolish standards and encourage an "anything goes" philosophy. Modern grammarians deny this and stress that poor use is not the same thing as poor structure. English structures are relatively constant and shared unconsciously by all speakers of the language; the skill with which these structures are used, however, is not shared and requires judgment and knowledge from the speaker.

In addition, "new" grammarians defend their position via language history. They contend that to deny that the actual use speakers make of their language influences its "correctness" is to deny a basic truth — that language changes, inevitably and noticeably over a given period of time. If these changes are corruptions, then English-speaking people are using an Anglo-Saxon language decayed by Scandinavian, French, and Latin!

Only individuals with special training can read Anglo-Saxon, the first English language recorded about one thousand years ago. The first line of the Lord's Prayer is a good example:

Faeder ure, Þu Þe eart on heofonum, si Þin nama gehalgod.

Both the vocabulary and grammar of Old English were basically Germanic, not Latin, as is commonly supposed; in fact, Old English was much like present-day German, a highly inflected language whose words are made meaningful primarily by the case endings each possesses. In addition, the early language took on Scandinavian vocabulary and spellings as a result of Viking invasions.

By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the language now known as Middle English had moved much closer to modern English, as is illustrated by this excerpt from Chaucer's **The Canterbury Tales:**

> A knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,
> That fro the tyme that he first bigan
> To riden out, he love chivalrie,
> Trouthe and honour, fredom and curtesie.

While still retaining its Germanic core, the Middle English vocabulary merged with French following the Norman Conquest. English grammar lost most of its inflections; as a result, word position became more important than word form in conveying meaning.

By the sixteenth century, except for differences in pronunciation and numerous Latin and Greek vocabulary additions emanating from the Renaissance period, English had become essentially the language of today.

Changes, however, have continued to occur. But they have been primarily in vocabulary and usage rather than in grammar.

Varieties of Usage

As an example of change, the people of England and the United States speak the same language and use the same grammatical structures. But Englishmen speak differently than Americans, using vocabulary, meanings, and pronunciation unfamiliar to their United States' counterparts. Similar differences in usage appear even within England and within the United States. These differences,

peculiar to a specific group or situation, are termed **dialects** and are generally produced by three primary influences: age, geography, and social class. Teenagers, for example, speak a dialect generally foreign to oldsters of twenty or more, and Southerners and New Englanders, particularly, may be identified by their speech. Social or class distinctions arise from differences among people's education, occupation, and economic status. In addition to the dialects produced by these three factors, one exists between speaking and writing. Finally the dialect most respected in either speech or writing becomes the "standard" language of a nation, the dialect to which most people aspire.

Modern grammarians consider deviations from the standard dialect incorrect only when used in a dialect to which they do not belong. Reinforcing this position is the fact that most people use several dialects more or less constantly. Bergan Evans, articulate spokesman for the "new" grammar, emphasizes that the educated man commonly uses at least three languages: one, a kind of shorthand with his family and close friends; another, more formal speech with business and professional associates; and a third, more literary language which he reads more frequently than uses, but turns to in times of great emotion or when asked to present a commencement address.

In contrast, proponents of the traditional view generally recognize two types of language use: correct forms and mistakes. Even when widely used and commonly accepted, many forms are considered undesirable for any occasion. From this viewpoint, "levels" rather than varieties of usage have been established, with the standard level the acceptable one from which at least two others descend: colloquial and illiterate. The colloquial level designates

words more commonly used in speaking than in writing, and the third level identifies unacceptable words.

Controversy over these usage distinctions extended to the general public with the publication of **Webster's Third New International Dictionary** in 1961. Appearing twenty-eight years after the **Second New International Dictionary,** the new edition was praised and panned by people who did know and people who didn't know a great deal about English. Chief among complaints was the deletion of the colloquial label in exchange for "standard" or "non-standard" designations. The dictionary's informality caused many to lose faith in what they considered arbiter of the English language.

Basically, the public reaction was one opposing change. But what, argue the dictionary editors, remains unchanged? Today, more people are reading and writing the English language they speak than ever before. This in itself stimulates greater informality. Additional changes have been inevitable because linguistics has established new information about language.

All this discussion leads to an important question: Would the usage controversy exist if there were no differences in the way people use their language?

Modern grammarians believe that a distinction between grammar and usage will better inform the layman than does traditional grammar. For this reason, they want to provide a comprehensive description of language and of current usage—not numerous commandments.

Summary

How does the "new" grammar work? The modern approach to the study of language redefines grammar, freeing it from its etiquette restriction. English grammar, after all, is comprised of the structural habits of a group of people rather than the logic or lexical meanings of their utterances. This concept changes the nature of grammatical analysis considerably — generally simplifying the entire process. In addition, it initiates a distinction between language matters primarily unconscious (grammar) and those primarily conscious (usage).

"New" grammar aspires to greater validity than that achieved by traditional grammar. To be effective, it requires increased knowledge and responsibility from all who wish to use the language well.

Part III

The "New" Grammar: What Are Its Implications For Teaching?

Modern grammar differs from traditional grammar in philosophy and in practice.

But is it better? And what are its implications for teaching?

Probably the most important question for the school administrator is this: Will introduction of the "new" grammar into the public schools improve pupils' use and appreciation of the English language?

The success of traditional grammar in developing linguistic abilities has been questionable. In fact, concern for Johnny's proficiency in reading and writing has become a topic of national discussion. The conclusion? Johnny cannot read nor write as well as he should.

To prove itself worthy of elementary and secondary school curriculums, the "new" grammar must offer a means of solving Johnny's problem. Its proponents say it can. First, by changing the philosophy of existing language programs. Second, by modifying existing language curriculums.

New Philosophy

Philosophically, the redefinition of English grammar evolving from current linguistic study liberates grammar from the "right and wrong" restrictions of the traditional

approach. Grammar is recognized as one aspect of the processes and functions of language. Such a concept, say experts, stimulates development of positive attitudes about language because it emphasizes general objective knowledge about grammar rather than obedience to specific rules.

In addition, it asks school language programs to include language history, comparative language study, usage varieties and dialects, semantics, and stylistic literary analysis in addition to English grammar.

But curriculum change involves problems.

Curriculum Change

First, expanded subject content requires increased teacher preparation. And this need is difficult to demonstrate because of the nature of language learning. The schools, after all, do not give each pupil his initial instruction in language; this has been provided by his parents, family, and peers. Consequently, an instructor cannot realistically start teaching at the beginning of a "complete" course of study and proceed to its conclusion. Language instruction is not that simple for another reason: everyone who speaks English is an "expert." The instructor therefore faces constant competition in his teaching and encounters the common notion—even among school personnel—that anyone can teach English.

Second, language as a subject defies departmentalization. Because it pervades all of learning, it cannot ideally be compressed into any single curricular unit. Even English professors argue whether or not it is a body of knowledge complete in itself, some suggesting that it be an adjunct

to other subject areas and others desiring that it be recognized as a distinct discipline.

Despite these problems, if it is to be effective, say its proponents, the linguistic approach to the teaching of English requires curriculum changes similar to those occurring in math and science.

Traditional grammar attempted deductively to teach pupils everything they needed to know about English. As knowledge continues to expand, however, this becomes impossible. Instead, today's experts suggest that English be taught as a problem-solving course with a subject base from which students operate inductively to solve the language problems which exist for them now—and in the future.

How would an inductive method work? In general, students would be led to raise questions and seek answers about the English language. They would be taught to investigate and learn to make increasingly mature use of the vast resources of English. As an example, they might be asked to formulate answers to open-ended questions like these:

—What language do you speak?

—How does language grow?

—Does English resemble other languages?

To answer the first question, students might record speech forms heard frequently in conversation to determine what expressions are common to particular age, social, or professional groups. They would thus gather their own proof of the existence of English dialects. In addition,

they could try to determine what regional or social factors influence their findings, or extend their research to the written word. To develop a semantics project from this, students might record the different meanings these groups give the same words.

Students might employ several approaches in answering the second question. First, they might study the general principles of word formation, among them, word combinations, as in **lipstick**; attachment of prefixes or suffixes, as in **pre-school**; analogy, as in **cafeteria** and **gaseteria**; or telescoping, as in **photo** for **photograph.** Second, they might use reference works to study the history of individual words: date of entry into the language, original meaning, present meaning, and so forth. Third, students might turn to current mass media to record words apparently new and attempt to relate them to the principles studied earlier.

As for the third question, students might compare English to a foreign language they are studying using the grammatical properties of word form, word position, and pronunciation as their framework of analysis.

Maintenance of Standards

If grammar study is to be part of a broad language program, however, the role of the schools in developing Johnny's abilities will need to be made even more clear to students and parents: the curriculum changes experts propose are not designed to eliminate "English" and abolish language standards.

The schools, in adopting the linguistic approach, continue to instruct pupils in the Standard English dialect because an individual's language reflects his social standing, and the person who cannot use the prestige dialect is handicapped in his aspirations.

But the schools must teach a realistic Standard English, say the linguists, and the only usage which can honestly be standard is that which is current. To be valuable to him, a student's knowledge of English grammar and usage must first of all be broad, and second, be as applicable outside of the classroom as inside.

Fundamental, of course, to each of these suggested aims—a positive attitude, broad language program, improved language skills, and proficiency in the standard dialect—is the accurate description of the English language itself provided by linguistics.

This description can help Johnny in the areas where he needs it most: reading and writing.

Reading and Writing

Substantial progress is currently being made in the teaching of reading, with a number of innovations influenced by linguistics. The phonics methods are obviously concerned with the sounds (phonemes) common in English. These sounds are recognized easily; a pupil's major difficulty comes in making the transfer from oral word to written symbol; even when he achieves this, a youngster may be unable to read well because he is reading sound by sound or eventually word by word, when true skill comes with an idea by idea understanding of written material. In

both elementary and secondary grades, acquaintance with even the most rudimentary concepts of modern grammar should help a pupil's reading by showing him what words commonly occur in certain pairs or groups. When he recognizes these groups, his stops in reading diminish and his comprehension increases.

Like reading, writing involves the transfer of verbal experience into written, conventionalized, symbols. Unlike reading, however, which requires only recognition, writing demands mastery of the symbols sufficient enough to express original ideas. And the wide range of meanings given speech by pronunciation, volume, pitch, pause, and emphasis are merely suggested by the written word and punctuation symbols. In addition, a pupil must struggle with a system of spelling which is not completely phonemic.

How does linguistics help with these problems? Principally by explaining the nature of the problems and by the reason "why" of many student deviations from the standard forms.

On a more advanced level, knowledge of English structures encourages fluency. If a pupil knows the basic word groups and sentence patterns, he has the components from which to build variations; with guidance, he can subsequently expand, combine, or substitute structures as he sees fit. He can become aware of the dimensions of style in the writing of others against which he can determine the effectiveness of his own writing.

Many a pupil's reading and writing problems are magnified because he is asked to understand a dialect unfamiliar to him. And the problem is becoming increasingly significant today with the growth of urban areas and the in-

creasing numbers of "culturally deprived" youngsters. What is such a child to do, for example, when he is told (as has been the case for years) that the language which serves him adequately in his own neighborhood is wrong? Can he reject it? Not completely; even if he does learn Standard English, he uses the other language to communicate with those at home. More often, he does not master Standard English at all.

Recognition in the schools that everyone uses several forms of the language can do much to encourage interest in the nature of dialects. Furthermore, the pupil does not have to reject his habitual language in order to learn the standard one. Essentially, he can study English as a foreign language—mastering its forms and examining its social roles. By starting with words he uses regularly, (**cool, fuzz, kook,** for example) a youngster can be led to think of equivalent terms and the particular context in which they might occur. The result? He gains the ability to make language choices according to their social appropriateness and he seldom remains disturbed by the discrepancy between what he hears at home and what he is taught at school.

Literature

If linguistics can begin to close the long-existent gap between the spoken and the written word, it may also draw the study of language closer to the study of literature.

A knowledge of language history, for example, is important to the instructor and class studying a literary work of any previous time period. Why did Shakespeare rhyme **flood** with **good,** for example, or use a double superlative

like **most unkindest**? Was Mark Twain an ignorant soul who just happened to write **Huckleberry Finn** in his own non-standard dialect? Certainly, attention to linguistic differences between a particular work and twentieth-century usage would enhance the study of many classics revered by English teachers and abhorred by students.

In studying any work of literature, however, students are concerned with not merely the text, but with what lies within it; the study of style can help open doors to meaning, for the sound is often the sense of a poem, the form an expression of meaning in prose writing. Style involves not only choices within the grammatical patterns of a language, but deviations from these patterns. And both can be examined with interest in any work of literature. William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway were the outstanding American novelists of the century. Why? For their style or for the meaning within their works? Their styles of writing differed radically. What linguistic patterns did each use? How did these contrasting styles contribute to the meaning within their works?

These, in brief, are some of the ways by which "new" grammar proponents hope to assist the nation's hypothetical Johnny with his language problems. More work is yet to be done, certainly, in relating the findings of linguistics to the teaching of English. But this approach presents new vistas for existing English curriculums. Its philosophy of language places grammar in a new, broad perspective.

Summary

Intended as a guide to the nature of the linguistic approach to grammar, this writing has attempted to answer the following questions:

—What is the "new" grammar?

Any grammar is the system of language structures used by a group of people to convey meaning. "New" grammar consists of an objective description of the structures of the English language system. The description is obtained by the study of speech: its characteristic sounds, word groups, and word forms. Scientific in technique, this study forms part of the discipline of linguistics.

—How does it work?

Linguistics has established the concept that the English language system gains meaning via four signaling devices: (1) intonation (2) word position (3) word form and (4) word function. These devices determine grammatical rather than lexical meaning, enabling individuals to manipulate English grammar unconsciously by the age of six. Recognizing change as an inherent quality of language, linguistics distinguishes usage from grammar, making usage another branch of the discipline.

The major innovation provided by "new" grammar for courses and curriculums is its philosophy of language and language study. Whereas traditional grammar presupposes the existence of an absolute standard of correctness for English and concerns itself primarily with avoiding deviations from this standard, modern grammar recognizes that language (1) changes over a given time period and (2) is

subject to variations in use. Instead of **prescribing** usage, modern grammar **describes** it, emphasizing the desirability of the standard dialect, not as the only form of English, but as the one with greatest prestige.

In effect, the new philosophy narrows the extent of grammar study and broadens the scope of a school language program by suggesting content such as language history, dialect study, and semantics be added to the customary reading, writing, and speaking concerns. Such curriculum modifications are suggested to stimulate increased intellectual curiosity and interest among students in English as a topic for study.

Certainly the "new" grammar itself continues to inspire interest, not only among lay people, but among scholars who are making discoveries and forming new grammatical theories. Under current discussion, for example, is the "transformation" concept which regards all English sentences as mathematically predictable transformations or modifications of basic sentence types. The discipline of linguistics may likewise be expanded by two developing interests: metalinguistics, the relation of language to culture in general; and psycholinguistics, the relation of language to human behavior.

Whatever and however many the innovations in language study, it will be increasingly difficult for the schools to ignore them with a "traditional only" policy. Acceptance of the "new" grammar, however, will place challenges and responsibilities on the part of school administrators and instructors as well. For instructors, "new" grammar requires increased knowledge and preparation; for administrators, "new" grammar presents the task of interpreting change to school faculties and, more difficult, to parents

and students. From the linguistic viewpoint, the benefits outweigh the difficulties.

Suggested Readings

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